

# Historically Black Colleges and Universities and The Olympic Games

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From the early years of the twentieth century until the middle years of this same century, athletes from historically black colleges and universities have participated in the American Olympic process. Many of the early years of participation were led by institutions such as Tuskegee Institute and Tennessee State, however, athletes from Howard University, Morgan State College, Maryland State College, North Carolina Central College, Florida A&M, and Lincoln Institute, among others also provided the foundation for African-American collegiate athletes to prepare for the challenge of competing against the best athletes in the world. In some instances it allowed these athletes to show that they were the best in the world.

The responsibility of preparing the African-American college athletes fell to individuals such as Cleveland Abbott. Abbott not only prepared athletes, he persuaded the Olympic Committee into going to black institutions to hold Olympic trials. The 1960s saw men like Cappy Anderson of Maryland State College and Leroy Walker of North Carolina Central take the lead in preparing black college athletes for the Olympics.

From the mid-1970s until the present time, the number of athletes from black colleges participating in the Olympics have declined. The colleges themselves are even considered for trial sites. Many reasons comprise the why in this decline. Amongst them is the fact that white institutions, with better facilities, equipment, opportunity, and more money are recruiting these athletes. When looked at from the perspective that black college athletes in other sports are still getting an opportunity to compete on the professional levels, then the recruitment of black athletes by white colleges does not hold for the lack of Olympic level participation.

This work is to look at the early participation in the Olympics, by black college athletes, the black colleges themselves, and the person that primarily paved the way for this participation, Mr. Cleveland Abbott. Materials for this work have been obtained from university archives, newspapers, personal interviews, and university annuals. Questions that will arise from this work are: Are athletics at Historically Black Colleges and Universities still profitable and necessary? Are the institutions themselves still necessary? And, Has integration destroyed black college athletics?